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PIEGAN TALES¹

BY TRUMAN MICHELSON

101 WHILE with the Piegans of Montana last summer, I collected the following tales in English. This was merely incidental to obtaining some first-hand knowledge of the language to determine its general position among Algonquian languages. Though Mr. D. C. Duvall interpreted but one of these tales himself, and related the last one, I have to thank him for providing interpreters for the others when he was not available. The informants were Big-Brave, Mrs. Julia White Swan, George Pable.

I. HOW THE BEAVER-BUNDLE WAS INTRODUCED²

539 A boy was an orphan, and his grandmother reared him. He was very poor, very ragged. He had sore eyes, and was very dirty. After he was washed, he was a very decent-looking fellow.

In those days the Piegans had no horses, but only dogs, with which to travel about the country. The head chief then had three wives; the youngest was a girl.

In those days Piegans were not jealous of their wives. The women had a dance-society, and at those dances they would imitate the dress of their lovers. So it appears, now and then the head chief's youngest wife had had connection with this boy.

The women started to have one of these dances. They began to dress up as they were going to the dance. So the head chief said to his wives, "Some one of you must have a lover. Why don't you dress up and go to the dance?" For a long time none of them got ready. Finally the youngest began to fix up, asked her husband if he had any coyote-skin. So the old chief began to dress her up as her lover looked. Her lover was very fond of carrying coyote-skin around his arms and legs and on his head. So she dressed just as he used to dress. He always wore the bottom of his robe round in front, so she cut her robe round in front. As soon as the chief saw how she was dressed, he knew who her lover was; and it made him ashamed that she had had connection with such a poor fellow with sore eyes, and so dirty; but he said nothing. So after the girl went to the dance, all who were in the dance knew whom she was imitating.

So when they commenced dancing, this young fellow told his chum between-times, "I've been having something to do with the chief's youngest wife." His chum didn't believe him. He laughed at him.

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² Compare Wissler-Duvall, pp. 81-83.

"Well, partner, I don't think that girl would have anything to do with you." — "Chum, let's go down to where they are dancing, and see who is there!" So they went down there. When they arrived there, he saw the girl dressed just as he was; and his partner saw her too. So his partner believed him, and said, "You're right, partner; you have had something to do with her; she's dressed just like you."

They were dancing at the time; so the girl spoke out after she had finished dancing, and told the people, "When the river gets warm, I'll float to the shore."

So it made the fellow ashamed to see her dressed as he was, because everybody knew then that he had had connection with her. They walked away, this fellow and his partner. He said to his partner after they had walked away, "Partner, come with me! I am going to some of these lakes to search for a dream, so that I may be a medicine-man. You will know where I am, then you may go home." His partner went with him to the side of a lake where there was a beaver-dam. He said to his partner, "In four days come back after me." So his partner went home and left him there.

He lay there four days, but didn't get his dream. He got up and left the place, and his partner came back in four days. He searched diligently everywhere for him, but could not find him anywhere. He went home. He thought his chum had been killed by the enemies.

The fellow that was searching for a dream went to the river and lay on a high cliff. He lay there crying, and acted in such a way as to inspire pity. He looked, and saw a boy near him. This boy said to him, "Partner, my father wants you to come down to his lodge. Shut your eyes." He shut them. When he looked up, he found himself in a beaver's lodge. He looked around. He saw the old man and old woman, who were Beavers. The old Beaver said, "My son, what are you sleeping around here for?" — "I'm sleeping around trying to find a dream to lead me through life." The old Beaver said, "My son, that's not very hard to do. Some day you will be a head chief of your tribe, but you have to stay here all winter with me." The old Beaver said to him, "What do you eat?" The young fellow said, "Well, I eat meat, and I eat pemmican." So the old Beaver said to his own son, "You go out and get me some buffalo-dung." So the young boy went out and fetched a lot of buffalo-dung. The old Beaver went through his performance of medicine-man, and covered up this manure. When he took the cover off this manure, it was all pemmican.

The young fellow lived on pemmican that winter. All around the inside of the lodge the old Beaver had different medicines tied up, — birds, beaver, weasel-skin shirts, and other medicine-shirts. At the exact rear there was a round pool of water. In that pool of water there

539 was a stick floating. That was supposed to be the old Beaver's son, but had turned into a stick. The old man said to the young fellow, "My son, when the river goes out three times, you may go home."

Every moon (i. e., month) the old man sent his own son out to see if spring had come; and every moon the old man sent his own son up and down the river to invite all the Beavers on the river and creeks; and every moon all the Beavers used to come and sing beaver-songs. At last the old man went out himself. He came back. He said to the young fellow, "The river's breaking up; in four days you may go home." He said to his own son, "You go and invite all the Beavers you can find to come. I want them to sing for your brother here, so he can take them (the songs) to his tribe." So the boy invited all the Beavers; and all the Beavers came, and sang for four days and four nights for the young fellow. They taught him the songs. The morning after the fourth night the old man said to the young fellow, "Well, my son, you may go home to-day." The next morning (after the fourth night?) the old man and old woman went outside. When they went out, the old Beaver's son told the young fellow, "You see all these medicines which are hung up around here? When my father comes in, he is going to ask you, 'Now, my son, look around all through these medicines here, and pick out what you want to take along with you;' and don't you take any of them. When he asks you, you tell him that you want the stick in the water here. The stick that's in the water, that's the chief of his medicines. He is going to ask you that four times. Don't you pick out anything but that stick. When he asks you that the fourth time, he will let you have it. He will try to put you off and get you to take something else; but don't you take anything else. When he sees he can't put you off, then he will give it to you." The old man came in. Well, the old man sat down. "Now, my son, you're going home to-day. You see all these medicines hanging around my lodge. They are all strong medicines. Pick out your choice,—anything you want to take home with you." The young fellow said, "I don't want any of them. I want that stick in the water." The old Beaver said, "Well, my son, that stick won't do you any good; there are all these other medicines hanging around here. They are better than that stick: you will get some benefit from them." The young fellow said again, "No, I don't care for any of them; I'd rather have that stick."—"Well, my son, you're very foolish. That stick will do you no good. You'd better take something else hanging around here."—"No, I'd rather have that stick in the water." The old man said, "Why, my son, that's foolish; there are other medicines here; they're better than that stick; they'll be of some benefit to you." The young fellow said, "No, I don't want anything else, only that stick." Well, the old man thought long

before he said anything more. Finally he gave a grunt, "Anhahan" 539
(this means it was against his will; he didn't wish to part with that stick). The old man said, "All right! Take your brother, then—take your brother, and look out for your ears. Do not leave him down: always wear him around your shoulders. If you leave him down, that's the last you'll see of him. That stick there is your youngest brother." Then he gave him a bone whistle. "Now, when you are on your way home, you will meet this big river here. When you cross it, it is going to be pretty deep: you can't wade it. Just put your stick down and sing one song. That stick will turn into a beaver. He'll cut some trees down for you, so you can make a raft to cross with."

Meanwhile he was fixing up the young man's face, and made a good-looking man of him. He cured his sore eyes, and everything like that. He made a fine-looking young man of him.

Well, the boy started out for home, bade him good-by, and kissed him.

When he came to the river, he couldn't wade it: it was high water. He put his stick down, sang a little song, and the stick turned into a Beaver. The Beaver walked off and chewed on a tree for him with his teeth. The young man threw the tree into the water. They got on, the Beaver and the young man, and they got across. The Beaver turned into a stick again.

The young man walked and walked; and, as luck had it, when he got to the top of a big hill, he saw a big camp-circle, — a camp of Piegans. He staid on that hill all night. Next morning, when it was early, the Piegans were searching for their horses all over. A Piegan saw the fellow sitting on the hill. This Piegan thought he was an enemy. He rode over to see who it was. He said to the young fellow, "Who are you?" The young fellow said, "Well, I'm so and so." He called his name. "Are any of my people still living? — my sister, grandmother, my brother-in-law, and my chum?" This Piegan said, "Yes; they're alive yet. They were looking very pitiful. They camp outside the circle there. We thought you were dead, that you had been killed. They're mourning for you. Their hair is cut off, and their legs are gashed. They're mourning for you." The young fellow said, "Will you tell my chum and my sister and my brother-in-law to make me four sweat-houses just as soon as they can. When they get the sweat-houses finished, send some one after me." So the fellow went back to camp and notified the people to build four sweat-houses just as soon as they could; and he notified them to invite several old men to be sitting there when he (the young man who had been with the Beavers) came.

The sweat-houses were finished, and the young man was sent for. The young fellow came up and went into the first sweat-house. He

539 invited the old men to take a sweat with him. He said to the old men, "I'm going to sing you songs that you never heard in your life, beaver-songs." He started in with his medicine beaver-songs in this sweat-house, and these old men were very much surprised. They had never heard these songs in all their lives. They went from the first sweat-house into the second, and went through the same performance. When he went from one sweat-house to the next one, he always left a pile of sand where he had been sitting until he went into the fourth sweat-house, and then the sand was all out of him.

From the sweat-lodge he went home, to his lodge where his brother-in-law was; and all his people came there to see him. They kissed him. They were all glad to see him.

Next day after he had got home, in the morning, a war-party was starting out. He said to his partner, "We don't want to keep where the bunch are: we'll keep to one side, just the two of us together."

After they started for war, he began to tell his chum what a medicine-man he was, and his dreams, and all that was given to him when he wintered with the Beavers.

When they had been out two days, they saw the enemy. They walked up to the river. The enemy were on one side of the river, and they were on the other. The enemy were the Cheyenne. The river was so broad and high that they couldn't get at one another to fight. The Cheyenne's chief would come down to the water, and would go up on the hill again. He was talking to his own people, but the Piegans did not understand what he was saying to his people.

The young fellow said to his chum, "Partner, I am going to play at beaver; I'm going to swim across under the water; and I am going to kill yon Cheyenne chief. You watch me when I get across. When I kill him, I'll dive down stream. But don't go away from here. When the Piegans all rush down stream, I'll come up here. We'll divide his scalp between us two." That's what he told his chum.

The young man jumped under the bank to make his medicine. He started in with this song [a beaver-song; I couldn't take it down]. When he was about to cross, his partner saw his head above the water. When the Cheyenne chief saw him jump in the water, he ran to the river. He jumped down the bank. He had a big spear. When the young fellow came out of the water to his waist, the Cheyenne chief waded in after him to strike him with his spear. When the Cheyenne chief waded in, the young fellow walked backwards to coax the Cheyenne to come in a little farther. The Cheyenne struck at him with his spear. The young fellow threw up his stick, and the spear struck the centre of the stick, and did not strike the young man at all. As the Cheyenne struck the stick with the spear, the young

man grunted "Anan!" He took the spear away from the Cheyenne and killed the Cheyenne with his own spear. He took the Cheyenne and dove down the creek with him. The Piegans saw him dive down the creek. They all rushed down the creek. He dove up stream to where his partner was sitting when he was halfway across. He pulled the enemy out to his partner, scalped the fellow, and divided the scalp with his partner; and took all that was on the Cheyenne, and divided that with his partner. When the Piegans rushed up again, they had taken everything the fellow had on him.

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Well, he and his partner led the way back then. They were chiefs. When they got pretty near home, the Piegans saw the war-party coming over the hill, singing scalp-songs. Some of the leaders of the camp began to cry out, "The war-party is coming back! You had better go out and meet your relatives. There are two fellows in the lead. I don't know who they are. They must have done something wonderful: that's the reason they're so far in the lead." When they got a little closer, then the Piegans saw who it was. The leaders cried out again, "It's so and so and so and so. They're leaders; they must have done something wonderful; their relatives had better go and meet them."

When the head chief heard it was so and so, he said to his wife, "Where's the girl?" Her sister looked for her, and found her in the brush, picking rosebuds, and told her, "There comes your lover; you'd better go change your clothes and go to meet him." She spilled her rosebuds right there on the ground, and started running home. The girl changed her clothes, ran back to her lover, met her lover with a kiss. Her lover gave her that spear and that scalp, and told her, "Give that to my partner. [You see, when one has connection with another's wife, they call him 'partner']."

So when the girl went home with this spear and scalp, she told her husband, "This is what your partner gives you;" and the old chief was very well satisfied. The old chief said to his oldest wife, "Go ahead and cook some grub; I want to invite my partner over here to supper."

When supper was ready, he cried out for his partner to come over and eat with him. When his partner, the young man, came in, the old chief said to him, "I'm the head chief of the Piegan tribe here, but I'm going to give away my chiefship; you shall be the head chief now. There's our wife (pointing to the girl); I give her to you. You shall have her for good. And this lodge, I give you this lodge; and I'll move out. There's my roll of beavers, I give that to you. I have four dogs and four travois; I'll give you two dogs and two travois to haul you around. And now you're the leader of the Piegans. You're the head chief now."

539 That young fellow introduced the beaver-bundle. The arrow-point on the turnip-bonnet is the arrow-point the young fellow got from the Cheyenne.

2. THE WOMAN WHO TURNED INTO A BEAR

A woman had seven brothers and one younger sister; that made eight beside herself. The seven brothers went to war. The woman was in a tepee in a big camp. One evening she told her mother, "I must take a walk." Every evening she told her mother, "I am going to take a walk." The old lady said to her younger daughter, "You must follow your sister next time she takes a walk."

So the younger girl followed her sister that evening, when she took a walk. Her sister went into a thick woody brush. The younger sister crawled up to her. She saw a large bear playing with her. The younger girl became frightened and ran home. She said to her mother, "O mamma! What did I see down there? I saw a big bear." The old woman told her husband, "Your daughter has been with a bear down in the timber." The old man said, "We will go down there and kill him the next time our daughter goes down there."

The girl took a walk again that evening. The old man got a lot of young men to get their guns. They all followed the young girl down to the brush. They sneaked up. When they looked, the bear was playing with her. The girl just started home when they shot at the bear. The elder sister went home, crying, with her younger sister. She sent the younger sister back. "Here, you go back; get me the bear's paw; don't let any one see you." So the younger girl went back and got a paw. When the Indians were cutting the bear in pieces, the girl sneaked up and got one of the paws. She went back with it. "Here you are, sister!" The elder sister was glad to get that, because the bear was her sweetheart, you know.

That evening she sat down crying. The younger sister said, "What are you crying about?" — "I was lonesome for my sweetheart," she said. "To-morrow get all the boys and girls together. We'll go down the brush, and I'll play bear."

So the younger one gathered all the boys and girls, and they went down to the brush. The elder girl, who lay in the brush, said to the girls, "You must take little arrows and tickle me." The boys and girls came up and tickled her. She jumped up and cried out like a bear. The boys pretended to shoot at her. She went into the brush again. The girls tickled her again. She called to her younger sister, "Don't tickle me on the hips; you can tickle me any place else; you must all look out." The younger girl went to the boys and girls. "What did your sister say?" — "My sister says you must not tickle her on her hips." The youngest said, "She can't do anything; let's tickle

her there." So they all sneaked up; and the youngest one tickled 539
her on the thighs. So the elder girl turned into a bear. She ate them
all up except her younger sister, and her seven brothers who were at
war. The bear ran into the tepees and ate everybody. She went into
her mother's lodge and turned into a woman again. She called her
younger sister. "You must come. I shall not kill you." So the
younger sister came out from the brush. The elder sister said, "Here,
sister, you're my servant." — "All right! I'll wait on you, and do
anything you want." So she cut wood, got meals, and did everything
a girl can do.

One morning the younger one went after water. Somebody called
her. "Sister!" She looked all around. It was the seven brothers
who had come back. "Come over here! We want to see you,"
they said to her. "What has become of all the people?" — "Don't
talk loud! Sister will hear you. Our sister turned into a bear and
killed off all the people." — "You go ask your sister what will kill her."
The girl went back. When she came in, her elder sister sniffed around,
and said, "It smells as if a person were around." — "Don't say that!
There's nobody around." — "Come up here!" the elder one said.
"Look on my head and put me to sleep." The younger sister said.
"All right!" So she looked on her head, and felt around her face.
"Poor sister!" she said, "I love you! I'll be an orphan if any one
comes along and kills you." — "Oh, don't be frightened about that,
sister. Nobody can kill me with a gun, nor can a fire burn me, nor
can I get drowned; I'm a medicine-woman." — "What can kill you,
sister?" — "Where I walk on my paws, an awl will kill me there."
— "Is that so? I didn't know that." So she put her elder sister
to sleep, and went after water again. Her brothers called her again.
"What did your sister say was going to kill her?" — "Oh, yes! She'll
die by an awl, brothers. You go around the camp and pick up all
the awls." They did so.

The next day they went down to the river when the younger sister
went to the water. "You take these awls," they said to their sister.
"Here's a rabbit for you. You cook it when you get home. Don't
give her any, even if she asks for it. Stick all the awls close to the
tepee." So the girl went and hid the awls outside, and went into
the tepee. She said to her elder sister, "I've got a rabbit for you." —
"Cook for yourself alone," the elder sister said. So the younger one
started cooking the rabbit. Her sister said, "Look on my head! Put
me to sleep again." So she did so. Then she went out and put awls
all around the tent, near the door and all around. The girl went back
to the lodge. The rabbit was done, but she didn't eat it; she was
waiting for her sister to wake up. She woke up. The younger sister
said, "The rabbit's done; do you want a piece of it?" — "No! Eat

539 it alone. Go ahead and eat it. It smells like persons. Somebody must be around." — "No, there's nobody around." So the younger started to eat the rabbit, but hid half of it. "I guess my sister must have catch all that rabbit," the elder one said, "I had none of it." — "No, I've got some more here for you." — "Eat it all up; don't save any for me," said the elder sister. The younger was putting away the dishes. "Did you eat it all up?" said the elder sister. "Yes; I don't care; I ate it up." — "I'll eat you up," the elder said. "I don't care; you may eat me up," the younger said. She ran out of the lodge. The elder sister turned into a bear again, and chased her. When she jumped out, she stepped on one of the awls and could go no farther. Her brothers shot and stabbed her, and made a fire, and pulled her into it. So the bear was nearly dead. "Let's make a bigger one, so that she will burn up well!" said the brothers. Then she burned to death. Then all left. At the time a little piece of her finger blew to one side. So she came together again. When the brothers and sister looked back, the bear was coming at them again. The oldest one told the middle one, "What do you think? Do you know of anything [that will be advantageous]?" — "I'll save all of you. I'm stronger than sister [i. e., the bear]; I'm medicine," he said. He took out a little feather. He blew it up into the sky. All seven brothers went up into the sky. They became the seven stars [the dipper]. "You run to that rock over there!" they cried to their sister. She ran there. Old-Man sat there making arrows. "Save me, save me! my sister is coming to kill me! She's a bear." Old-Man raised the rock up. "Sit under there!" She crawled under. He shut the rock down on her. He sat there making arrows. The bear came. "Where is my sister?" Old-Man said nothing, but kept on fixing his arrows. "Where's my sister, before I swallow you?" — "Get out!" he said. He took a butcher-knife, cut off her ears and tail. "I'm not going to kill you, just make you suffer," said he. "You're going to look like that." He opened the rock again. "Come out and be happy!" he said to the younger sister. That's the end of it.

3. THE BUFFALO-ROCK¹

There was once a very poor woman who was married. She was the second wife. She had a buffalo-robe. It was all full of holes, it was so old. Her moccasins were as old and ripped as mine.

This woman went after wood. While she was gathering wood, she heard some one singing. She found a buffalo-rock that was singing. It sang, "Take me! I am of great power."

The camp of Indians was about starving. They were near a buffalo drive. She told her husband to call all the men, and they would

sing and bring the buffalo back. Her husband asked her if she was in earnest. She said, "Yes," and asked him to get a small piece of the back of a buffalo from the Bear-Medicine man. She told her husband how to arrange the lodge inside in a kind of square box with some sagebrush and buffalo-chips. She told her husband to ask some men to come, and to ask for the four rattles they used.

It is a custom for the first wife to sit close to her husband. After the second wife had told him this, he had her dress in the first wife's dress and sit next to him.

One of these buffalo-rocks began to sing, after all the men were seated, "The buffalo will all drift back." So this woman asked one of the young men to go beyond the drive and put a lot of buffalo-chips in line; then they were to wave at them with a buffalo-robe about four times, and at the same time to shout in a singsong. At the fourth time they (the buffalo-chips) would all turn into buffaloes and go over the drive, which they did.

The woman led in the singing at the lodge. She knew what the young man was doing. A cow-buffalo took the lead. The woman was singing about the leader that would take them over the drive. All the buffalo went over the drive and were killed. She sang a different song: "I have made more than a hundred buffalo fall over, and the man above the earth hears me."¹

4. OLD-MAN AND HIS STEP-DAUGHTER

Old-Man had a step-daughter. He fell in love with her. One day he became sick. He said to his wife, "I am going to die to-morrow. Don't wrap me up in blankets: just bury me on the top of the hill." When he was dying, he called his wife and step-daughter to him, and said, "If any young man comes around here, make your daughter marry him. He will help you along. I'm sorry I'm going to die."—"I'm sorry. All right, Old-Man, I'll make my daughter marry any one who comes along."

Old-Man pretended to die that night. They buried him on the top of the hill. They covered him (not wrapped him) with a blanket. The old lady and her daughter were crying all day. That evening somebody came along. The daughter said, "Mamma, some one is coming along." The old lady said, "You know what your step-father said. You'll be married to that fellow if he comes here." Old-Man, changed to look young, and painted up, went into the old woman's lodge. He said, "Where are you travelling to?" The old lady said, "I've just lost my husband, Old-Man. I buried him over on the hill."—"What are you folks going to do?" Old-Man said, "I feel sorry for you folks.

¹ I suspected Christian influence in this last, and asked Big-Brave (Mountain-Chief, father) what the name of the man above was. He replied, he didn't know.

539 You ought to get your daughter married." The old lady said, "Old-Man said the first man that came along should marry my daughter. You may have her."—"All right," said Old-Man.

The old lady fixed up a tepee for them to live in. The next morning, when Old-Man was sleeping, the girl got up first. He had a scar on his shoulder. The girl saw it. She looked hard at him. The paint had rubbed off his face. She knew he was Old-Man. She went to her mother's lodge. "That's Old-Man; that's your husband. I'm not going to stay with him." The old woman said, "I'm going over and fix him." Old-Man heard her. He took his blanket and skipped out. The old lady went to the top of the hill where they had buried him. There was only the blanket there. He was gone. She said to her daughter, "Trick on us."

5. OLD-MAN AND THE GEESSE

Old-Man saw some Geese. He went to them, crying. They asked him what the matter was. "So and so, the chief of the Geese, is dead."—"We never heard of him."—"Well, to think that you don't know about your own chief, while a stranger does! All the Geese know about him." They became interested. He got them to agree to smoke a pipe with their eyes shut. He took a curved stick and killed several by hitting them over the head. The rest peeped and flew away. Old-Man cried out, "What fools you were to think there was a chief of the Geese!"

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